

*National Ingratitude exemplified,
in the case of Gideon, and his fam-
ily; and applied to the present
Times.*

A

SERMON

PREACH'D

In Little - Wild - Street

November 5, 1740.

By JOSEPH STENNETT.

The FOURTH EDITION.

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3 E R M O N



JOSEPH STEPHENSON

THE FOURTH EDITION

JOHNSON

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JUDGES viii. 34, 35.

And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their GOD, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.



NE can never enough admire the wisdom of God, in preserving to us, under the old testament, so exact a record of the *Jewish* history; wherein, besides the evidence it affords to the dispensation of the gospel, we have a most illustrious display of the divine perfections, in the conduct of providence towards a nation, which God had separated from all mankind, to be the partakers of the special marks of his favour. Nor can one well read the account,

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count, which the sacred historians have given us, of the great impieties which abounded among these people, while they were in the plentiful enjoyment of the bonities of heaven, without astonishment. Thus, as this part of divine revelation furnishes our minds with the most delightful ideas of the mercy, and forbearance of God; so it fails not, likewise, to give us a proper view of his justice and holiness. We have a large account of the righteous judgments, with which he took vengeance on the iniquities of *Israel*: and, by their history, not only private persons, and lesser communities of men, but the most powerful nations in the world are taught, what are the natural, and will, in the end, be the certain consequences of obstinacy in sin. The dreadful issue of their case, who were once the peculiar favourites of heaven, is indeed awfully instructive! When the measure of their iniquities was filled up, they felt the weight of such calamities, as no history besides can parallel: and these judgments have issued at last, in that contemptible and wretched dispersion, to which the poor remains of this sinful people have, for many ages, been exposed, and in which we behold them at this day. A condition, which is a standing evidence of the atrocious nature of their crimes; as well as of the truth of that revelation which foretold it, and of the faithfulness of those promises which relate to their future restoration.

THEIR

THEIR disobedience was often attended with very provoking circumstances; but no aggravation has a more frequent, and special mark of the divine displeasure upon it, than their ingratitude: a sad instance of which we have, in the passage I have proposed to your consideration.

THE sacred historian informs us, that having obtained a compleat victory over their oppressors, under the conduct of Gideon, and having enjoyed an happy tranquility, for forty years, under his administration; he was, in a good old age, gathered to his fathers. And no sooner was he laid in his grave, but this ungrateful nation forsook the worship of the living and true God, and entered into covenant with idols. They turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baal-berith their God^a. They forgot all the sacred engagements they were under to the God of their fathers, who had so often given them salvation and victory; and who, lately, and within their own memory, had rescued them from the vilest slavery; and had, in so wonderful a manner, restored to them both their religious and civil liberties. They remembered not the LORD their GOD, who had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies on every side. And this wicked defection from all regard to their duty to God himself was, naturally, attended with base ingratitude to the memory of the eminent person, whom he had

^a Ver. 33.

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had raised up for their deliverance: thus they slighted the posterity of that great and good man, who had led them on to battle with such conduct, valour, and success; and had govern'd them, for so many years, with so much wisdom and moderation. *Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to the all goodness which he shewed unto Israel.*

THESE things are written for our warning. And, that we may make the best improvement of so affecting a part of sacred history, on this memorable occasion, I shall,

I. GIVE you some account of the great obligations these people were under to divine providence, for a long series of wonderful deliverances; and, especially, for that recorded in the context.

II. I shall shew you, what kind of returns the laws of reason and religion required of them, both to their divine benefactor, and to such instruments as he was pleased, from time to time, to raise up for their deliverance; and especially, to the extraordinary person mentioned in our text.

III. I shall observe what little regard this unhappy nation paid, to either of these obligations.

IV. I

IV. I will endeavour, a little, to expose the sin, and folly of this conduct. And,

LASTLY, make some application of these things to our own circumstances, and the solemn occasion of this day.

I. I am to give you some account of the great obligations the people of *Israel* were under to God himself, for the many extraordinary appearances of providence in their favour; and, especially for the instance recorded in the context.

AND, whoever considers them, first of all, as a family, and will trace them back to their original, will find they were distinguished, by divine goodness, from all the families of the earth: and this too, without any foundation for a meritorious plea on their part. The figure which their great progenitor *Abraham* made in the world, was the pure effect of a peculiar providence which attended him; and that which he made in the church, was owing to the extraordinary grace bestowed upon him. He, together with the patriarchs, who were his immediate descendants, all acknowledged, that they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*^b: and, yet, in this state of pilgrimage, they were so remarkably preserved by the divine care, so richly supplied with every thing that was necessary to their temporal

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poral support, and so highly honoured with spiritual blessings, even with an intercourse with God himself, as no family upon earth, besides themselves, could boast. They endured, indeed, a most grievous servitude in *Egypt*: but yet, *the more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied and grew*. So prodigious was their increase, that, in the space of four hundred years, and when by the mighty hand of God they were brought out of that bondage, they could number no less *than six hundred thousand men, besides children*.

THUS, the God of their fathers, who had so remarkably preserved, and provided for them as a family, failed not to make bare his arm, and that in a most signal manner, for their deliverance, when they were become a nation. The book of *Exodus* informs us into the character, and commission of the extraordinary person, who was appointed to be their leader: there we read of the mighty signs and wonders, which were wrought by his hand; the variety of miraculous plagues, with which their cruel oppressors were punished; and the wonderful passage that was opened for them thro' the great deep; a passage, which proved the grave of the *Egyptian* tyrant, and all his host. Time would fail me, were I to recount the astonishing appearances of divine power and goodness which attended them, during their travels thro' *the wilderness*.
There,

There, was this great nation preserved, for forty years, in a desert, void of all provisions necessary for the support of human life; their bread came down from heaven, and their water out of the flinty rock; their cloaths did not wax old in the journey, neither did their shoes wear out: and tho' they were chastised by fiery serpents for their iniquities, yet when they were humbled under the mighty hand of God, a miraculous antidote was immediately provided against that deadly poison. They were surrounded, indeed, with numerous and powerful enemies; but troops of guardian angels incamped about them for their protection, and God himself was pleased to descend, and dwell in the midst of them. He gave them a body of laws written with his own finger, pitched his royal pavilion among them as their sovereign, and marched before them, in a pillar of a cloud, and of fire, as the captain of their salvation. Their terror fell upon all the nations round about; and when any of them dared to give them any disturbance in their journey, they soon found, to their cost, that the Lord of hosts was among them. This *Amalek* severely felt, when he attempted to obstruct their passage^f: and the success that attended the lifting up of the hand of *Moses*, in that battle, ought to have secured to heaven the lasting glory of the victory. It was the same almighty power also that overthrew *Sibon* king of the *Amo-*

^f Exod. xviii

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rites, and Og king of *Bashan*, on the borders of the land of promise, and having defeated the purposes of *Balak*, turned the curse into a blessing^g.

If we pursue their history into *Canaan*, we shall find, that, tho' at their entrance into that good land, the instruments God makes use of must be changed; and *Moses*, who had conducted them thus far, with such inimitable wisdom, patience and labour, must resign his government and his life together; yet, the Lord is at no loss to provide a proper successor. And the meekness of the former, which was so admirably suited to the condition and temper of that people in the wilderness, is exchanged for the martial genius of the latter; by which, under divine influence, he was so well fitted to *speake with the enemy in the gate*, and to lead them on, when they were to contend with so many mighty nations for their inheritance. But all *Joshua's* courage, and skill in the art of war, would have been to little purpose, if God had not been with him. At his command, the waters of *Jordan* turned back, and *the floods stood up in an heap*^h, to make way for the tribes to take possession: at the command of God, the walls of the first fortification miraculously fell down, when attacked by no other human power, but the sound of rams horns, and the shouts of the peopleⁱ: this was followed with the surprize of

^g Numb. xxi. and xxii.

ⁱ Chap. vi.

^h Josh. iii. 10—16.

exemplified, and reprov'd. 11

of the city of *Ai*^k, and the defeat of five potent princes, with their united armies. The Lord fought that day from heaven for his people, and *more* of their enemies fell by *bailstones*, than Israel slew with the sword. Then it was, that *Joshua*, filled with the spirit of the Lord, cried out in the presence of all the tribes, “*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon.*” And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. And there was no day like that before it, or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel^l. Such was the rapidity of *Joshua*’s conquests, and so mightily did he prevail; that, as no single nation could stand before him; so when the neighbouring princes heard of the defeat of these five kings, they entered into a much more formidable alliance; and came up against Israel with an host, as the sand on the sea-shore, for multitude, and with horses and chariots very many. But the sacred history informs us, that God so strengthened his servant *Joshua*, and all the people of war with him, that they fell upon this mighty army, at the waters of Merom; and smote them, till there were none remaining; and boughed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire. Thus *Joshua* took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses,

B 2

^k Chap. viii. ^l Chap. x.

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and gave it for an Inheritance unto Israel^m. And thus, by the mighty power of God, were they settled in this good land, the garden of the whole earth: they had rest from all their enemies, and were both feared and envied by all the nations round about them: they were instructed by prophets inspired from heaven, the priesthood of divine institution ministred at their altars, they had the only true religion in the world, and God himself was pleased to continue his presence among them.

It would have been happy for this nation, if such special, and extraordinary goodness had been improved in a proper manner by them. But alas! when *Joshua* was no more, and another generation arose, which knew not the Lord, nor the works which he had wrought for Israelⁿ, they soon fell off from their allegiance to the God of their salvation. This naturally provoked the divine resentments, and exposed them to the inroads, and tyrannical oppressions of their neighbours. But, even, when in this condition, they no sooner humbled themselves before the Lord, and cried to him for help; but he appeared on their behalf, and failed not to raise up proper instruments for their deliverance. Thus were they freed from the yoke of the king of *Mesopotamia*, by *Othniel*; from the *Moabites*, by *Ehud*; from the *Philistines*, by *Shamgar*; from the *Canaanites*, by *Deborah* and *Barak*; and

^m Chap. xi.

ⁿ Judg. ii. 10.

exemplified, and reprov'd. 13

and from *Midian and Amalek, and the children of the east*, by Gideon. Which brings me to the case, more immediately, before us.

AND you will find, by consulting the context, that the same cause had produced the same effect. They *did evil in the sight of the Lord*, it is said, and he delivered them *into the hands of Midian for seven years*°. These enemies were the more formidable, from the implacable resentment they had against *Israel*; who had been corrupted in their manners, and their religion, by the *Midianitish* women, under the direction of a wicked prophet, in the time of *Moses*; and the judgments of God upon *Israel* for this defection, had been followed with such a dreadful slaughter of the *Midianites*, as could never be forgotten by their posterity^p. They were at this time also very numerous, and were joined, as you see, by the *Amalekites, and the children of the east*: and what greatly increased the danger was, that they had gradually spread themselves over all the land. It is said, they were as *grasshoppers* upon it. Their oppressions were already very grievous: they had reduced the people of *Israel* from flourishing circumstances to a very low state of poverty; they had robbed them of their cattle, and of the fruits of the field, and were rioting in the produce of their labour, while many of the poor *Israelites* were obliged to hide themselves from their cruelty, in *strong-holds and caves of the earth*.

And

° Chap. vi. 1.

^p Numb. xxxi.

And then, as to religion, as the *Midianites* had been before, perhaps, more fatally instrumental than any other nation to seduce them to idolatry; so now, to all appearance, they had nothing left to expect, but that with their expiring liberties, all the remains of the true religion would be utterly extirpated from among them.

IN this miserable condition, *they cried unto the Lord*. And God, whose ears are always open to an humbled nation's cry, looked down in compassion upon them. He remembered the promises he had made to their fathers; and he sent a prophet to lay their iniquities before them, to put them in mind of former obligations, and of that ungrateful behaviour which had brought them into these deplorable circumstances; and, by seasonable exhortations, to prepare them for a salvation, which, at this time, they little expected.

THEIR deliverance being determined, God is never at a loss to find instruments to execute his purposes. *Gideon the Abiezrite* is called out, to lead the people, on this great occasion. A person who, though he had, hitherto, made no great figure in his country, yet, from the character given him in the book of *Judges*, seems to have been admirably qualified for so important a service. The angel that brought him his commission from the court of heaven, salutes him with the title of a *mighty man of valour*. And his history gives us one of the most beautiful examples of that happy character, where true courage is regulated

lated by solid judgment; and where the warmest ambition to deliver one's country from a foreign yoke, is so tempered with humility and moderation, as to take no advantage of the success of so great an undertaking, to its prejudice. He had a true sense of the value of civil liberty: and, which crowned all, he had a sincere and lively regard to that holy religion, which was the glory of his ancestors, and had been handed down thro' a series of miracles to his own time; but now seemed to be in imminent danger of being subverted by the idolatry of the heathen.

ENCOURAGED by the vision of the angel, and some other miraculous pledges of the divine favour, he sets out on this glorious enterprise: and begins, where every good man ought to begin such work as this, with the reformation of his own family, and the destruction of the altars of his father's house. Thus he not only bravely bid defiance to the heathen enemies of his country, but to their gods also.

THE *Midianites*, and their allies, immediately took the alarm: they collected their strength, and encamped their vast army in the valley of *Jezreel*; whilst *Gideon*, supported with the goodness of his cause, and the promises of divine assistance, is neither intimidated by this powerful and numerous host, which covered the ground *like the sand on the sea-shore*; nor is he discouraged by the poor appearance of his band of three hundred

men :

men: for, to that small number was his army reduced, by divine appointment, that God might secure all the glory of the victory to himself. Thus, in the exercise of strong confidence in God, and, at the same time, in the prudent use of as artful a stratagem as ever military skill produced, he surprizes the camp of the enemy. And who, indeed, can sufficiently imagine the surprize; when, with the sound of three hundred trumpets, this vast multitude was roused from the security of the night; and their astonishment increased, by an immediate illumination all round the camp, attended with the victorious shout of, —THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON? The effect was, that the whole army was thrown into the utmost consternation; and, in this terror and confusion, *the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow*, and the rest became an easy prey to the *Israelites*, in their flight.

THUS by this amazing turn of providence, was this distressed nation, at once, delivered from the cruel and servile yoke of *Midian*; and under the conduct of this great man, the tribes were happily restored to their religious and civil liberties. Nor is his moderation and love to his country, after this victory, less to be admired, than the wisdom and valour he discovered in obtaining it. For when the people, in the present lively sense of their obligations to him, would have broken in upon

upon their constitution, in order to aggrandize him and his family, and made him a tender of absolute power, he generously refused the offer, gave the glory of the victory where it was justly due, and said, *the Lord should still rule over them*^f; contenting himself with such a degree of authority, as the limitations of their national settlement, which was a theocracy, admitted of: and, in that capacity, he governed with such impartial justice and clemency, that his administration was attended with great tranquility to the public, and much honour to himself, for no less than forty years.

FROM this general account of things, you see what obligations this nation was under to the divine care and goodness all along, and especially for the great salvation that was wrought out for them, under the conduct of *Gideon*. I come now therefore,

II. To enquire, what sort of returns were due from them, both by the laws of reason and religion, to their divine benefactor; and also, to such instruments as he was pleased, from time to time, to raise up for their deliverance; and particularly, to the extraordinary person mentioned in the text.

AND I am sure you will, immediately, agree with me, that as the common blessings of providence lay men under indispensable obligations to their great creator, and prefer-

^f Chap. viii. 23.

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ver ; so these obligations must increase, in proportion to the favours bestowed on them. And thus, as God had raised *Israel* above all the nations of the earth, and had pour'd such floods of goodness upon them, as no people in the whole world besides enjoyed ; surely if the light of nature had been attended to, it would have been impossible that a grateful sense of these things should have ever worn off their minds : or that the frequent and surprising interpositions of the divine arm in their favour, in seasons of the most imminent danger, and when help could be obtained from no other quarter, should not have kept them humble, and have engaged them to ascribe all the glory where it was justly due.

THESE great appearances of God in their behalf, were often the fruits of national humiliations, and strong cries to heaven : they were frequently attended with the most public and solemn vows, and engagements to God. He had taken care sufficiently to inform them how jealous he is of his own glory. And to assist the frailty of human nature, and to keep a thankful sense of such extraordinary events alive upon their hearts, a sacred memorial of them was recorded, by divine inspiration ; proper festivals were established ; sacrifices, and other religious rites were instituted ; suitable songs of praise were provided, by the spirit of God himself, for those solemn occasions ; and a succession of prophets were sent, from time to time, with a commission from

from heaven, to remind them of their obligations, and stir them up to gratitude.

Thus it was reasonable to have expected, especially while new wonders were still working in their favour, that they would not, easily, have forgotten those that were past. How should the civil magistrates have exerted their authority to this purpose, and taken care to recommend a grateful spirit to the people, by their own pious examples? And how active and diligent should their spiritual leaders have been, in this very important part of their work? One would, indeed, have thought, that the nation in general would have preserved a thankful remembrance of the many wonders wrought out for them: and would have laboured to impress the minds of their posterity, with the same sense of these things. As they, and their forefathers had been esteem'd precious in the sight of God, and been preserved *as in the hallow of his hand,* and *as the apple of his eye*; one would have thought, the glory of their great friend, and preserver, would have been dearer to them than life itself. God had always esteemed their enemies as his: and therefore gratitude should have taught them, to have look'd on all the enemies of God as theirs. The perfection of the divine nature, indeed, is such, as can admit of no accession of happiness, from any thing creatures can do: but surely a constant tribute of humble thankfulness, of love, and obedience, must have been reasonably expected

pected from a people thus distinguished. And that the true religion, and other liberties and honours of a very extraordinary nature, with which they were entrusted, and were thus wonderfully restored, should have been esteemed sacred, should have been properly valued, and have engaged their unshaken loyalty to their divine benefactor, throughout all generations.

AND, indeed, if they had but attended to their own true interest, which in most cases, influences human nature stronger than any other motive; they would have seen, that nothing could so much secure their reputation among other nations, the peace of their own minds, and a succession of blessings to their latest posterity, as a thankful, fruitful, and religious improvement of the abundant mercies they had received.

BUT, to what I have said, I must yet further add, that not only reason, but the holy religion which they profess'd, gave the greatest sanction to their obligations. They knew that the foundation of the ruin of mankind in the fall, was laid in the sin of ingratitude. And they had been sufficiently informed into the malignity of this sin, by the destruction of the old world, and of the inhabitants of the fruitful plains of *Gomorrha*, as well as of the many nations who had fallen before them in *the wars of the Lord*. Gratitude is the grand motive by which the whole moral law, which was delivered to them

them with such awful circumstances, is enforced; as you may see by the preface of it. And their great lawgiver, when he took his dying leave of them, had in a most solemn and affecting discourse, as ever was delivered, set before them these obligations, in a very particular manner; and recorded them also in that divine song, with which he concludes it^u.

AND then, as the most grateful returns were due to God himself; so natural justice and humanity, as well as religion, would have taught them, to have shewn a suitable regard to the instruments, he was pleased to employ in their favour. They should have been treated with due respect and honour while living; their memories should have been embalmed after death; and national gratitude should have been entailed on their posterity.

THIS certainly ought to have been the behaviour of the people of *Israel*, in the case before us. How deeply should the sense of so extraordinary an appearance of God on their behalf, have been impressed on their minds? And with what devout and lively thanksgivings should they have celebrated it? How solicitous should they have been to preserve that holy religion from any heathen mixture, which had been so miraculously rescued from the ruin designed it by the heathen? And how faithfully should they have improved those liberties, which were restored
in

in so amazing a manner, when they seemed to be at the last gasp? The very name of *Gideon* should have been always dear to *Israel*. They should not only have paid him the honours due to his great merit, while he lived among them; but have been just to his memory, when dead. His valour, and conduct as a general, his wisdom, and justice as a magistrate, and above all, his firm faith in God should have been properly regarded by their posterity, and imitated by all his successors. And surely one would have thought the family of so worthy a man, would have partaken largely of the favour of the people, and whatever differences subsisted among them, all parties would have united to have shewn their gratitude to their great deliverer in the most honourable treatment of his offspring. Thus it ought to have been. But alas!

III. THE history of those times informs us what a different sort of regard this unhappy nation paid, to each of these obligations.

THEIR ingratitude to heaven was, indeed unparalleled. They were hardly ever delivered from any great distress, but they forgot the miseries they had endured, almost as soon as they were removed; and the vows of thanksgiving, as soon as their prayers were answered. Tho' saved in a miraculous way, they would either give the praise of it to their own sword and bow, or to the gods of the heathen.

heathen : and sometimes even to the idols of those very nations, under whose tyranny they had been groaning. The liberties which were often thus restored to them, by the marvellous interposition of divine providence, were neither properly valued, nor improved. And when, in the ordinary course of things, or as a proper rebuke for their iniquities, they were subjected to any inconveniences, nay, even in the fullest liberty, and greatest affluence of outward enjoyments, they indulged themselves so in murmuring against God, that it is as great a miracle, as any we read of in their history, that they were not utterly destroy'd from the face of the earth.

WE have sad instances of this behaviour, at their coming out of *Egypt*, at the red sea, and in the wilderness. How did they loath the manna of heaven, as light food ; and murmur at the length of the way, though the great *Jehovah* travelled with them ? Such was their turbulent spirit, that when they were commanded to fight they would lay down their arms ; and when God would have them forbear, they would go up to battle. Nay even in the sight of the mount, where just before, they had heard the thunder of God's voice, and seen the lightening of his eyes, and to the top of which *Moses* was ascended, to receive the law at the hand of the Lord, they bow the knee to a calf of their own making, and provoke the divine Majesty with the vilest abominations of idolatry. This treatment of
God

God himself, was also attended with a suitable measure of ingratitude, to the several worthy instruments he was pleased to employ, from time to time, for their good. What could be more evident, than the divine commission of their first great leader and lawgiver? what could be more glorious, than the whole course of his administration? And yet *Moses*, with all his wisdom, faithfulness, and indefatigable labour for the public good, with the miraculous sanction of heaven to support him; and a constant series of most marvellous success, found himself very frequently distress'd by the murmurings of this ungrateful people, and his personal character often loaded with reproach: and this, not only from the common people, but from their elders; as in the case of *Korah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram*^x; and in that also of *Aaron* and *Miriam*^y, who from the ties of blood, as well as other the most strong obligations, were bound to have behaved towards him, in a very different manner.

AND thus, if we descend to the case before us, we shall find that the same spirit prevailed, after this great salvation, which is recorded in the context. *The children of Israel*, it is said, *remembered not the Lord their God*: they forgot the near relation they had the honour to stand in to the great God of heaven; they forgot how often he had approved himself to be *their* God in covenant: they

they seem'd by their conduct, to have lost all sense of the misery they had lately been in, of the supplications they had sent up to heaven for relief, of the vows they had made in their distress, and the glorious display of the divine wisdom, power, and goodness, in their deliverance. It is strange, indeed, that such an entire victory over their implacable oppressors, that a salvation so sudden, so compleat, and attended with such a miraculous restoration of liberty and plenty of every kind, and, above all, of the free exercise of their holy religion, could ever have been forgotten by them. But alas! so it was; *for the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had deliver'd them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side.*

AND to this account of their ingratitude to heaven, the sacred historian immediately adds, that they neglected to *shew kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shew'd unto Israel.* Such was the envy of the tribe of *Ephraim* towards their deliverer, and the chosen men who fought under him, that the slaughter of the *Midianites* was scarce over, when they discovered it, in a very ungenerous manner: but the admirable moderation of this great man, in the flush of a victory, overcame their seditious spirits, as his arms had done the enemies of their country: and when they very severely charged him, with neglecting to call them time enough to obtain

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a larger share in the glory of that day; with what inimitable prudence doth he calm their passions? *What I have done now*, says he, *in comparison of you? is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim, better than the vintage of Abiezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb, and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you?* The valour indeed of *Gideon*, the love he shewed to his country, and the wonderful success which attended this glorious enterprise, had such a present effect on the body of the nation, that they would, as has been observed, have changed the very form of their government in favour of him, and his family: and, it is very probable, that while in his lifetime he continued to lay fresh obligations upon them, by the prudent, and impartial discharge of the high trust which was committed to him, he preserved some considerable interest in their respect. But, when he was no more, and his personal labours and services were at an end, the national regard to him ceased also; and all obligations to his memory were laid aside. One would indeed have thought, that when it was out of their power to make any farther returns to his person, they would have considered him as, in some sort, yet living in his posterity; and have treated them with that respect, which was naturally due to the immediate descendants of one, who had, so eminently, approved himself to be the common father of his country. But, in-
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stead of this, the chapter immediately following our text, informs us, that *Abimelech*, the son of his maid-servant, being supported by the men of *Shechem*, entered into a most unnatural conspiracy against his father's house: and having, with their assistance, hired a band of ruffians, barbarously murder'd his *seventy brethren upon one stone*; and then seized on that authority which *Gideon* had piously refused. Nor doth it appear that, in all this outrage, he met with any opposition from the tribes of *Israel*. And if we may judge of the rest of *Gideon's* children, who suffer'd this cruel usage; by the figure the youngest of them makes in scripture history, they had by no means forfeited their title to the regard of the public. For *Jotham*, who was the only one that escaped this assassination, with a wisdom and bravery suitable to his blood, went, and stood on the top of mount *Gerizzim*, and there, publicly, reproached the men of *Shechem*, for their ingratitude to his father's memory, who had *fought for them*, as he said, *and adventured his life far, and delivered them out of the band of Midian*: and then, under a spirit of prophecy, he foretold the vengeance that would pursue both the one, and the other, for the cruelty done to the house of *Jerubbaal*. Which, accordingly, very soon came to pass, to their mutual destruction: for, the men of *Shechem*, who had thus assisted *Abimelech* in his tyrannical usurpation, and the inhuman treatment of his

father's house, like other traitors, soon rebelled against him who had employed them. They were, indeed, quickly vanquished by his arms. But, he had no sooner executed the sentence of heaven upon them, in a dreadful slaughter, destroying their fortresses, razing the very walls of their city, and sowing the foundation of it with salt; than he himself also fell, by the ignominious hand of a woman. And, *thus, says the sacred penman, God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren. And all the evil of the men of Shechem, did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal*^y. But,

IV. WHAT I further designed, was to expose, in some measure, the sin, and folly of this conduct.

AND here, I am sure, I need not take up much of your time. The guilt of this flagitious crime of ingratitude, as perpetrated against God himself, is aggravated, in proportion to the dignity of the divine character, and the great and innumerable obligations we are under to him. And the folly of it appears, in full light, when we consider the jealousy he has for his own glory, the threatenings which attend it in his word, and the terrible examples which are recorded of his vengeance both on angels and men, for this iniquity.

^y Chap. ix. 56, 57.

iniquity. But, experience teaches us that, whatever regard men pay to their obligations to one another, 'tis true religion only, which will engage them to a grateful treatment of their creator and preserver, and to behave in a becoming manner, towards that good God, who, in the midst of all their unworthiness, has made such ample provision, not only for their welfare here, but for their everlasting salvation. Which, as it evidently discovers the dreadful effects of the fall, on all human nature; so, it shews the absolute necessity of the supernatural work of the holy spirit, in order to restore our minds to such a temper, as to pay a due regard to the first principle of right reason.

THE injustice of such a behaviour as this, towards our fellow-creatures, might be argued from the rights of nature, which, certainly, oblige every man, as he is made for society, to promote the common good; and will allow of no injury to another; no, not to those to whom we are under no special obligations. Ingratitude is therefore the height of injustice: 'tis so, to the person injured; and the crime is encreased, as in the case before us, in proportion to the damage it brings to the public. And, upon a little reflection, it will appear also very foolish, as it is contrary to our own interest, and inconsistent with the rules of self-preservation. But divine revelation carries things vastly higher than all this; it directs us, *if our enemy hunger to feed him,*

him, and if he thirst to give him drink ². 'Tis the glory of our holy religion to teach us, that we must do good for evil, *bless them that curse us, and pray for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us* ². And, as experience shews us that this behaviour is, commonly, sooner or later, attended with honour and happiness in this world; so it has many promises of the divine favour, and rewards of a nobler kind annexed to it, in the word of God.

THUS, if it be our duty, and our interest, to be not only just and kind to all men, even to our enemies; what must be the malignity of that evil, how full of injustice and baseness of spirit, where men break through the first principles of nature itself, and the clearest dictates of conscience, and return evil for good? 'Tis a vice condemned by the general consent of mankind; and must be exceeding abominable in the sight of God, as it appears so directly contrary to the mercy and goodness of his nature, and the constant tenor of his law, and, most of all, to the obligation laid on us by the genius, and grace of the gospel. And then, public ingratitude is that species of this sin, which you will easily see is most baneful, most provoking to heaven and most pregnant of every evil to ourselves as well as other men. In a word, the danger, as well as the folly of it, will abundantly appear, if we consider that, as it is

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² Rom. xii. 20.

² Matt. v. 44.

exemplified, and reprov'd. 31

most injurious to human society, and greatly tends to discourage brave and useful men from engaging in difficult and important services; so it is apt to awaken the sharpest resentments, in those who are in this manner abused. And, however men may escape the punishment due to such a criminal behaviour in this world; yet, the natural notions we have of God, as well as the plainest declarations of his holy word, assure us, that such sort of injustice cannot, without repentance, go unpunished in the world to come. But I hasten,

V. To endeavour to make some application of these things to our own circumstances, and the memorable occasion of this day.

AND with regard to our national obligations to the great governour of the world, it must, I am sure, be acknowledged, that we have not only been favoured with the common blessings of providence; but the happy spot on which we dwell, for the temperature of the climate, the fruitfulness of the soil, the plenty of all the provisions of life, the advantages of its situation both for commerce and defence, the number, natural strength, and genius of its inhabitants, and, above all, for the liberties we enjoy, both religious and civil, is the glory of the whole earth, and the envy of all the nations in the world. Thus, as it was with God's people
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of old, *the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, and verily we have a goodly heritage.* As *Israel* was rescued, by the arm of the Lord, out of the bondage and darkness of *Egypt*; so were our fore-fathers, many ages ago, from the idolatry of the heathen, and in later times from the captivity of *Rome*, which was worse than that of *Babylon*. They had the law and the prophets; but we have had the superior privilege of the gospel of our Lord *Jesus Christ* long planted among us; and it has been watered by the blessed effusions of the Spirit of God.

THE many political schemes which have been laid, the unwearied industry that has been used, and the many violent measures which have been attempted, in order to deprive us of these invaluable blessings, and to subject *Great Britain* again to the *Romish* usurpation, sufficiently shew, that the *Papists* have all along esteemed it, as the principal bulwark of the protestant religion.

THE execrable design of the powder treason, the providential discovery of which we this day commemorate, is a sufficient evidence of this. Whoever will but consider by what inhuman measures the faith of that church has been propagated; what rivers of blood have been shed, and what millions of souls have, with variety of tortures, been hurried into eternity by the cruel hands of *Papists*, must be worse than blind, if they cannot perceive, that 'tis impossible a church established

blished on such a foundation should have the least claim to christianity; the genius of which is, like its great author, *meek and lowly*, and full of gentleness and goodness. But, I think, the history of popery itself, which is the most bloody of all histories, cannot, from its beginning, furnish us with any instance besides, of so desperate a kind as this: a design that breathes the very spirit of the infernal pit; and in the execution of which, a worse than brutal cruelty was to be glutted with such a sacrifice, as was never before offered up to *Moloch* himself. With what horror is the imagination struck, at a faint representation of the frightful scene such a blow must have produced? the king, the nobles, and the judges, together with the flower of all the gentry in the nation were, in one moment, to have been blown up into the air, and their mangled carcases to have been mingled with the ruins of the royal palace, and the seats of justice: the greatest houses in the kingdom were to have been filled with the lamentations of widows and of orphans: and that which would have compleated this dreadful catastrophe was, that by the advantage of the confusion all sorts of men must be in on such a shocking occasion, a religion was to have been introduced which could justify such savage violence, and a tyranny in government that should be the genuine fruit of it.

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of this plot, shews how watchful heaven has been of our safety: and it must argue, I was going to say, a worse then *Jewish* stupidity, if we can possibly forget the obligations we are under for so great a salvation.

BUT lest this should be the case, divine providence has rendered this very day in our calendar still more memorable, by the wonderful rescue of our religion and liberties from the designs of the very same enemies, at the glorious revolution in 1688: a deliverance still fresh in the memories of many yet living.

THE throne was then possess'd by a prince who was a profess'd papist, and one zealously devoted to the interests of that church: a circumstance which had not happened to this nation, since the bloody reign of queen *Mary*. The priests and other agents of that communion had overspread the land like *grasshoppers*; as the *Midianites* covered that of *Israel*, in the days of *Gideon*. Not only the king's family was full of them, but they appeared on the bench of justice, and at the counsel table. The Jesuits erected colleges and seminaries in most great towns; and four bishops were publicly consecrated in the king's own chapel, and sent down to exercise their functions, in their several diocesses, as vicars apostolical, while their pastoral letters, address'd to the laity of their own communion, were printed at the king's printing-house, and dispersed over all the king-

kingdom^b. Seven bishops, and many other zealous patriots of *English* liberty were imprisoned, and many of the charters of it were seized: no posts of honour or profit could be pretended to by any, but by *Papists* and their adherents; and the judges, corrupted by the king, gave up the laws of *England*, by their decision, to his dispensing power; by which, together with his ecclesiastical commission, his embassy to the court of *Rome*, and the manner in which the nuncio was received from thence, he made it no secret, that he was determined to divide matters with the *pope*; and having reconciled the three kingdoms to spiritual slavery, to take the absolute power over their lives and fortunes to himself.

SUCH was the sad condition of these nations, when our fathers cried unto the Lord, and he was pleased, beyond all human expectation, in that critical season, to appear; and to raise up a deliverer for us, who, like *Gideon* of old, bravely rescued our religion and our liberties; and in doing which, like him, he spared not the altars of his father's house. Whoever duly considers the number of king *James's* land-forces, and the strength of his navy; and at the same time reflects on the seasonable arrival of the prince of *Orange*, the auspicious winds which favoured the landing of the handful of men

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^b See *Rapin*, Vol. xv. pag. 72.

he brought with him, the pannick fear that disconcerted all the measures of the popish counsels, the desertion, not only in the fleet and army, but among the gentry and at court, which was followed with the flight of the king himself; whoever, I say, reflects on these things, must, I think, acknowledge, that all was the evident effect of the same miraculous hand, which delivered *Israel* from the yoke of *Midian*: and in this, it exceeded even that deliverance, that this great affair was carried into execution, with scarce any bloodshed.

AND if *Gideon* afterwards suitably punished the insolence of the men of *Succoth* and *Penuel*^c; I am sure, we may see the hand of God, and the valour of our deliverer abundantly display'd, in the speedy reduction of *Ireland*; and the check he gave to the pride of the *French* tyrant, in his own life-time: as well as the low condition to which he was reduced, by the plan the great king *William* laid, and which was happily pursued in the glorious part of the reign of his immediate successor, under the conduct of the brave duke of *Marlborough*.

NOR can I help observing that, as *Gideon*, in the height of his glory, generously refused to break in upon the constitution of the *Israelites*; so our deliverer, in his acceptance of the crown, in a parliamentary way, was equally tender of preserving ours. The former

^c Judges viii.

ner ruled the tribes for forty years in great tranquillity: and the latter, with the frequent hazard of his life, and with a course of indefatigable labours, laid the foundation of all that peace and plenty, which we have already enjoyed for a longer term.

AND here I wish I could stop, and that there were no just occasion to carry the parallel any farther. But if *Israel* forgot the God of their salvation, if they forgot their former deliverances, and those of later date, if they neglected, corrupted, and betrayed that holy religion, with which they, above all the nations of the world, were intrusted, if they abused and trifled with those liberties, which were so often recovered, or preserved by such amazing interpositions of providence, I am sure the inhabitants of these islands should read the history of that nation, with shame and confusion of face. *Gideon*, indeed, who rescued the liberties of *Israel*, and restored the free exercise of religion to that people, enjoyed the advantages and returns of his public services, during his own life and administration. But it was far otherwise with our great deliverer. It is well known, that many of those who were saved by his valour, who lived under the sunshine of his gentle government, and were even fed at his table, by a most quarrelsome, and ungrateful opposition to public measures, cramp'd his great designs, and rendered his crown so burdensome to him, that under the weight of these
distresses,

38 *National Ingratitude*

distresses, his constitution was thought to sink more, than under all the toils of the field. To which I must add, the ungenerous manner in which his memory has been used since his death ; together with the pains which have been taken to depreciate that glorious *revolution*, of which he was, under God, the happy instrument. And if it is recorded to the dishonour of *Israel*, that they neglected the posterity of *Gideon*, when their father was no more ; what shall we say of the treatment that illustrious house has met with, which king *William*, in great wisdom, and a truly paternal love to these ungrateful nations, adopted as his family, and which inherit both his crown, and his excellent qualifications for government ?

It cannot be denied that, ever since this happy succession took place, we have enjoyed an uncommon measure of rest from our *enemies on every side*, and such an affluence of every good thing, as our fathers before us could never boast of. And it would have been well, if this long tranquility, and all these other blessings, had been suitably improved. But whoever considers the atheistical contempt which is cast on the principles of our holy religion, and the progress of all sorts of prophaneness, and practical iniquity among us, together with that indolent spirit towards every thing of a divine nature, which is to be observed in the generality of good men themselves, will find that we have copied after ungrateful

grateful *Israel*, and made sad returns indeed to our bountiful benefactor.

NOR is it one of the least threatening circumstances upon us, that, to a general disregard of providence, and of the great governor of the world, men have, too naturally indeed, connected a contempt of their rulers here below; and instead of being *afraid to speak evil of dignities*^d, they seem to strive which shall out-do the other, in reproaching that good government, under which they enjoy all these blessings.

A MAN that has any due regard to the glory of God, and the true interest of his country, can hardly forbear making some mournful reflections on this occasion. That the friends of popery, and the pretender, should be uneasy under such a state of national tranquility, and should use their utmost endeavours to disturb the public peace, is no wonder: but it is astonishing indeed, that they should be capable of prevailing on such as, one would yet hope, are no hearty enemies to our constitution, to join with them in their wicked labours.

No government in this world is entirely free from defects; neither have the greatest, and best men which nature has produced, and whom providence has placed in authority, been absolutely perfect. It is easy to point out some spots in the character of a *Moses*, a *Joshua*, or a *Gideon*: but shall these supersede

superfede all regards to their public usefulness? If common justice forbids us to attack the reputation of a private person, from jealousy and surmise only; and that we should call his integrity in question, without proper evidence; certainly, with much greater strength of reason, it may be proved, that men in public stations are entitled to our charity: and as their springs of action, and the ends they have in view, are often out of our sight, right reason will forbid us to determine about those things, of which we can be no competent judges; so a proper regard to our own safety, as well as common justice, will oblige us, to be very cautious how we give any encouragement to a misrepresentation of their conduct. But a man must be a great stranger to what passes in places of public resort, who doth not frequently observe, that the most unkind, not to say the most malicious constructions, are put on almost every measure taken by authority. And things are admitted very often without the least pretence of proof, in such conversation, where, if a man was to use a person on a level with himself in the same manner, he would not fall of meeting with a suitable rebuke. It is easy to see with what a dangerous design, that invidious distinction has been of late industriously propagated, between the interest of the COURT and COUNTRY: and indeed no method seems to have been left unattempted, that might have a tendency to disunite the
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the king and his parliament, to render the crown uneasy to his majesty, to alienate the hearts of his subjects from him, or to give encouragement to our common enemies, both abroad and at home. And all this, for I will dare to say it, notwithstanding the general disaffection which has been wickedly fomented among us; all this, I say, under the best, the happiest, and the mildest administration in the whole world.

Is it not astonishing, that men of common understandings will believe, that we are reduced to the utmost poverty, notwithstanding the low interest of money; and in defiance of that growing luxury, which comes under every one's observation, and may very justly fill the hearts of wise and good men with concern? And is it not equally strange, and wicked, to persuade us to imagine we are in a state of slavery, while we sit under our vines, and our fig-trees, and there is none to make us afraid? while no man in England, perhaps, obtains his right with so much difficulty, as the king himself.

GOD is a God of order; government is his own institution, for the benefit of mankind; and when it answers the proper ends, for which it was appointed, he cannot fail resenting the ungrateful treatment, those rulers meet with, who have been the instruments in his hand for the public good.

THE ungoverned liberty which is taken, not only in conversation, but by the press, is
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such, as I believe no age or nation can equal: and what the consequences of this growing evil may be, in the end, to our constitution itself, I will not take upon me to say; but of this I think we may be assured, that, while these writers are daily scattering their treason over the whole kingdom, in order to persuade us into a belief, that our liberties are in danger from the administration; this is so far from being true in fact, that the impunity they meet with, is a most plain confutation of that very scandal, which their seditious libels are designed to propagate. Indeed the rage of this *opposition* has transported the leaders of it into such an entire disregard to truth, and the absurdity, as well as malice of the tales they are continually spreading among us, in order to stir up our jealousies, is so evident to those who examine them with calmness, that one would wonder how it should be possible, for any man of understanding, and integrity, to be imposed upon by them.

THUS, if an alteration in the manner of collecting a part of the public revenue, is proposed in parliament; tho' it be, by many of the best judges, thought both wise, and equitable, and in other instances found to be so, 'tis presently loaded with a design to enslave the nation: If a negotiation be entered into in order to prevent a bloody and expensive war, it is at once, and even before it comes to any maturity, represented as the effect of weakness and pusillanimity, or as a direct

direct design to sacrifice our commerce, and our honour, to the most contemptible of our enemies. Tho' it is apparent that the violation of that very *Convention*, which has been so rudely handled by these men, has, very happily for us, removed every shadow of an objection, to the justice of the war in which we are engaged. In this manner has our government been treated, for not rushing into a war, without the caution which so important an affair required: and tho' now it is entered into, and pursued with all the vigour, that our situation will admit of; yet the same spirit still continues: by which it will, most evidently, appear to a cool observer, that, whatever these men pretend, their hearts are not really so much set against the public measures, as against the persons who conduct them. For if, in the course of the war, our enemies ships escape by the favour of the night; of fogs, or winds, or a wide sea, the administration must bear the blame; not to say how our brave sea-officers have been used on these occasions. If any of their forts are attacked and conquered, lest those who hold the helm should have any share in the honour, it is represented as acting without orders. Nay, if the winds of heaven delay a well-concerted expedition, no regard, it seems, is to be paid to divine influence herein, but our governors here below, instead of our sins, must answer for it: or if the seasons prove unfruitful, and a scarcity ensues; instead of

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being humbled under the national crimes which provoke God to deal thus with us, we are taught, like *Israel* of old, to murmur against our rulers. So that one can hardly tell which to wonder at most, the wickedness of those who raise and foment these unreasonable clamours, or the folly of such who believe, and propagate them. For, after all this outcry, and these laborious endeavours to stir up the jealousies of the people, and to provoke them even to rebellion itself, if you ask these righteous *patriots*, what has been done, that should give them occasion to raise and foment such an unnatural spirit among us; what can they say? when they speak plainly, what do they say; but that our troops are increased in time of war; his majesty and his parliament agree, the administration of public affairs has remained in the same hands for above twenty years; and, which too evidently lies at the bottom of all, the government is so blind, as not to see the reasonableness of taking them into its service, who have shewn so good a disposition to overthrow it; and continues so resolute, as not to suffer itself to be frightened into such a preposterous measure as this? Nor is it uncommon for these men, when they are driven hard, to affront the understandings of their fellow-subjects so far, as to argue for the reasonableness of the dissatisfaction, because it is so much spread: when, in their consciences, they know, that the only true reason
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which can be given for it, is to be drawn from their malicious and united labours to foment it.

THERE is also another notion, which has been of late much propagated among us, and that is, that some opposition ought to be encouraged, even to a good administration, as the most effectual means to preserve it from corruption. How far indeed this maxim is to be justified by the rules of policy, it is not my province to determine; no, nor how far divine providence may be pleased to overrule wicked actions, so as to bring about good ends: but I am sure, that to oppose that which is right, for fear of that which is wrong, or to *do evil that good may come*, are principles which will not easily be reconciled with the rules of true reason, or the laws of justice, humanity, and religion. And, after all the clamour that has been made about the increase of the national expence at home, and the ill treatment we have met with from some powers abroad, it would be no difficult matter to make it appear, that these, as well as many other public inconveniences, which we labour under, are the natural product of this boasted *opposition*.

THEIR endeavours have been carried on with so much industry as may, in some measure, account for the imposition which has passed on the minds of many well-meaning people, who have not had the happiness to be bred up in principles of true liberty.

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But it is equally to be admired, and lamented, that any of the *protestant dissenters* should be captivated by their dissimulation.

I KNOW when disaffection is become fashionable, it is very difficult to convince men of a mistake, into which such numbers have run before them. But for once, and in a matter of such importance to the public peace, to the interest and honour of the nation abroad, and to the security of our religion, and the continuance of our liberties at home, to our own welfare, and that of our posterity, let us sit down a moment, and ask our own consciences, what it is we feel, that should occasion our uneasiness? And if experience testifies, that no time can be pointed out in all the *English* history, nor perhaps in that of any other nation, wherein liberty was enjoyed in a more ample manner; let us then be ashamed of this wicked *opposition*. Let us remember, that it was equally the glory of our fore-fathers, to contend for the liberties of their country, when they were really in danger, at the hazard of their lives; and peaceably, and thankfully to improve those liberties, when they enjoyed them. And no doubt their sighs and tears would have been turned into songs of joy, and their prayers into thanksgivings, had they lived to partake of the plentiful blessings, of that kind, which we inherit, as the fruit of their sufferings. God forbid that we should lose these inestimable privileges by our ingratitude to
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heaven, or by taking any part in that barbarity with which the instruments of our happiness are treated ; or that ever we should be left to so fatal a credulity, as to venture ourselves into the hands of those men, who, notwithstanding all their specious pretences to love a present turn, have always taught us, when they have had it in their power, that *their tender mercies are cruelties.*

As the nation is already engaged in a war with one power, and we know not how soon the quarrel may be more extensive ; let us be convinced, that the true way to become formidable to our enemies, is to be watchful against those snares which are laid to draw off our hearts from his majesty's person and government, and to divide the hearty friends of liberty among themselves : and let us be assured, that nothing can so effectually secure the divine protection in our favour, as to be thankful for the privileges we enjoy ; and to improve them to the glory of God, and the peace of our country.

God has been warning us by awful providences : as we have trifled with a plenty of good things, he has threatned us with a scarcity of bread ; and while too many among us have been sporting with the winds, he has shewn us, by a sudden storm, how soon he could have dashed our boasted armaments to pieces, on the shores of our enemies. But, notwithstanding our unworthiness, he still waits to be gracious. It is our mercy that there

there are some left among us who in general infatuation, and lament it, should yet encrease upon us, and be properly *national*, nothing short of which calamity may be then expected, in consequence of **WHATSOEVER** others do, let us strive for the happiness we enjoy; and do what is in our power, in our several stations, to promote loyalty to his majesty; to show the hands of that wise and gentle administration, under which we live; to assist our misguided fellow-subjects; and, in all, to improve our liberties and powers, and the follies of those who are not sensible of them, to the most valuable ends of religion.

F I N I S

